

Kiss the Vision Awake – a unique collaboration of four Aruban UNESCO schools 2-3

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In March 2023 a unique project started, funded by UNESCO, to strengthen the participation of the four UNESCOs schools at the island Aruba. Based on social constructionist thought, the four schools collaborated to make not only plans for their future collaboration, but also to build strong relationships between teachers, students and parents. We have written a serie of 3 short articles as a result of the project.

In the 1. article we describe the foundation of the project and some practical ideas, how to put social construction in to action. In the 2. article we will go more in depth and practice how to build a strong Vision within the schools, to improve the sustainability for change and future actions. In the 3. Article we will go more in depth how we have worked to establish an increasing parental involvement, in the Unesco communities of the 4 schools. It may be clear that we ground our transformative change work on social constructionist theory not to confuse by social constructivism.

In this 2.-3 article we describe how we worked with the schools how to renewed the schools vision an integrate UNESCO's mission and vision in this. The activities are based on social constructionist theory as outlined in the first article How to build Hopeful futures together.

Context

Within the UNESCO Participation Project at the island ARUBA, which took place januari 2023, the school staffs of Princes Amalia, EduCampus, The International School of Aruba (ISA) and Colegio Hillario Angela, co-created many ideas for keeping the strong collabration powerful for the coming years. Based on the ideas of social construction, all schools could think about relevant topics to work on. Based on the social constructionist thought (article 1) it is important to give participants *voice and influence* from the start of a change process. By doing so they connect with the proces, which is important because in the end the result of the vision will influence their daily work and conversations in schools.



During one of the meetings two schools decided to take the opportunity to work on their school vision and to integrate some of the Unesco ideas. The aim was to collaborate on what possibilities their would be to integrate UNESCO's vision in Aruban set vision by the government.

Often schools visions are frozen, dusty, static documents. A small group of teachers has worked on it in the passed years, and meanwhile new teachers have entered the building , who have not being part of it. Due to the many tasks and the daily turmoil, the vision is put to sleep – simply said, put in the cabinet and locked. The vision is not really alive anymore, is put asleep.

The other thing which was important in this project is that teachers are practitioners. Very easy they put things concrete in action but....often a kind of mutual and deep understanding misses or is given to less

attention. In the Unesco projects this often leads to wonderful projects, but when we look more precisely to it, these projects are not really connected to the schools vision, and become therefore less sustainable at the long term. This is exactly why we think this article could awaken our important work within the UNESCO projects. It might be helpful to re-think the own vision and find some practical activities for how to do so.

From a static to a living vision

As written, often a vision in schools is an obligation – a must have - “from above”, something we need to have because school inspection will ask for it, or otherwise. And as we often see, from *this sense of obligation*, school leaders or the management staff will start to write these documents, cut and paste it from other documents, discuss it shortly with the teacher staff, put a signature on it, anchor it, as written-in-stone for the future.

Of course we are aware that we exaggerate this a little, the reality is more diverse and of course there are schools who do it totally different and who are more successful in this. The best way in working with school vision is to co-create this vision with the school community, giving voice to many, establishing meaningful processes, to bring it to life and...keep it alive.



Therefore we approach vision in this article, and in this project, as dynamic, living visions. They come alive in daily practice, in daily communication. In fact they come alive in the daily thinking and doing of all. Again social constructions offers a strong foundation to use relational processes – the ongoing interactions – to create and sustain such visions. The first article in this series gives more background about social construction. It's people in schools who should live the vision. They make it come alive!

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The danger of just doing nice things for the short term

Unesco offers so much inspiration, and so many important issues to work on. The danger is, when we do not anchor these activities in a collective, supported vision, that we linger in doing just nice things at the short term. A vision in which we integrate UNESCO's elements, and where schoolmembers have dialogued and collaborate about it, opens up more opportunities for the sustainability at the long term. As long as we keep dialoging, collaborating and feeding this vision, it stays alive. The first start however is to bring the vision back alive. The metaphor of snowwhite helps: Kiss the vision awake...

Kiss the vision awake

After many years of efficiency improvement, cost reduction and remediation, school organisations are now focusing on deeper questions such as: why do we actually exist? What do we stand for? Where do we want to go? What are our unique qualities? Answering these questions requires a vision. A vision binds people and gives direction. It is a source of energy and contributes to increased effectiveness. It is the beating heart of an organisation. But what exactly does vision mean? How do you develop a vision? And above all, how do you bring a vision to life within an organisation? In this article we try to show how to successfully develop and realise a vision and how to create commitment and support within the school organisation.

What is a vision?

A vision is the umbrella term for both the vision of the future and the basic philosophy of an organisation. A vital vision is the soul and beating heart of an organisation's culture. To fulfil this function, a vision must be genuine and balanced. Only then a culture can emerge, that has sufficient depth and diversity to be energetic and effective. We used the work of Van Loo & Geelhoed¹ as an important inspirational source.

¹ Van Loo & Geelhoed (2009). *Kus de Visie Wakker*

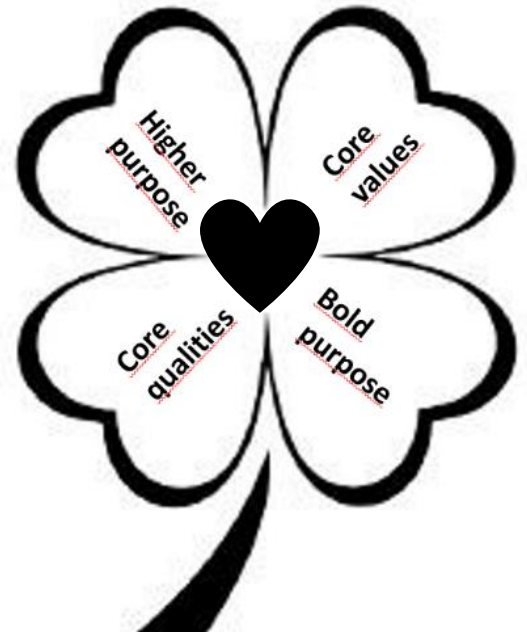
They developed a four-part for creating a vision, which exists of the following elements:

- *Core values: what an organisation stands for;*
- *Higher purpose: why an organisation exists;*
- *Bold goals: where an organisation is going;*
- *Core qualities: where an organisation excels.*

This four-part were used for the preparation of excersizes during two days of training. The excersizes were based on social constructionist thought where the four elements, namely *Appreciation, Building Bridges, Collaborative Relating and Dialoging practices*, as described in the first article, where the leading guidelines.

In our opinion we think we need to co-create such a vison in collaboraton with all relevant partners, especially those who need to work ,based on this. Again centralising the relational processes leads to a collective meaning giving and construction of such a vision and will give more garanteer that it will be embraced and used.

But of course that is not enough. As soon as the vision is collectively created it needs to be watered, feeded. Van Loo & Geelhoed (2009) describe in their work a proces with different phases:



Awakening	Ignite	Orienting	Discovering	Unfolding
The phase when people are awakened by deep feelings of need or of excitement.	The energy generated by going through the previous phase must be ignited. This is done by involving people who believe in the proces.	People need to look at the various possibilities.	The vision is discovered and formulated.	The newborn vision forms a vital force within the organisation

To summarize

- We used social construction as the foundation for our handling and thinking
- Four elements were the guiding principles for establishing relational processes: Appreciation, Building Bridges, Collaborative Relating and Dialogical practices
- Fourt-part formed the structure of the created vision:
 - *Higher Purpose*
 - *Key Values*
 - *Core qualities*
 - *Bold Goals*
- The final vision is the beating heart of the school organisation.

Let’s look at the concrete activities. We will describe the activities we executed during the training days. Perhaps they will be helpfull for your own vision project.

Steps and activities

Opening

We started with some energizers, creating a nice, safe and open atmosphere. The two staffs of the two different schools didn't know each other very well. We chose exercises which make fun and break the ice. Furthermore we talked about the importance of having an energetic vision, which functions as a compass for future activities. In this case: activities based on UNESCO ideas.



Checking in (15-20 minutes)

- 1 Walk around in the room
- 2 when you here a clapping hand form the facilitator make a pair of 2 and talk about: wjat did you eat this morning?
- 3 Walk around, opay more attention and say hello, look friendly
- 4 Clapping hand: stop, make a pair and talk about: what do you expect today?
- 5 Walk around, pay even more attention say, greet each other by a high five, a handshake or whatever, Stop, make a pair: What makes you special, what do others say?
- 6 Say good bye, for the last time, walk around. Stop. Look each other for 5 secondes in the eyes and walk further.
- 7 Make an appointment to see each other during a break or lunch moment today.

We will describe briefly the four sessions for awakening the new vision

Session 1 : Co creating the Higher Purpose



In this session the purpose was to think about the central question: why do we exist as a school?

9xWhy? 20 minutes

We started with a Liberating structure: the 9 why's (20 minutes). Participants were asked to make pairs of two. A interviews B for 10 minutes with the question: why do we exist as a school? After each answer A would ask B: Why? And will repeat this after every answer 9 times to go more in depth. After this the pairs would change their roles B would interview A 9 times why. Notes were made on post-its/sticky notes. More information go to:

<https://www.liberatingstructures.com/3-nine-whys/>

Short information session 10 minutes

The facilitator gives a short presentation about the UNESCO VISION and Mision. Participants are asked to make notes what they find important.

Dialogue in groups of 4 (20-30 minutes)

New groups of 4 were made. They would use there collective knowledge and discuss the question: when you will return to your staff, what do you want to bring in the discussion when the topic is the Higher purpose? Again new notes were made to take it later in the team discussion.

Staff discussion (30- 45 minutes)

All groups went back to their original staff, because we were working with two school staffs at the same time. In this staff discussion the school leader would lead the discussion: what do we want to take into our Higher propose? Notes were made at a large flipover.

Break: time for tea and coffee.

Session 2 Co creating- the Key Values



After the break we worked further on the topic Key Values.

Presentation - 10 minutes

The facilitator introduces shortly the topic of Key Values. What are our values? What are the values of Unesco? What values do we want to take in our renewed vision.

Key values: what an organization stands for

- Deeply held beliefs that state what the members of an organization believe is right and of essential.
- Values in organizational context are pa. customer-centric, entrepreneurial, innovative, responsible for results, progressive, leading, continuous improvement of quality, open, communicative, team-oriented, results-oriented and integrity.

Interviews in pairs of two: what Precisely...? (2x15minutes)

Again new pairs were created, and asked to interview using the following questions:

*What value **exactly** do you consider as an important key value in your teaching/ in education?*

*What **exactly** should I imagine this key value to be, tell me more....?*

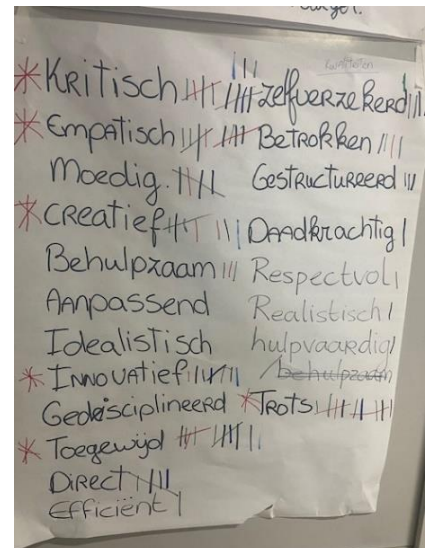
*What **exactly** is this key value important to you?*

At the end each partner makes a list of the discussed values.

Staff discussion (30 minutes)

All participants go back to their original school staff. The school leader will lead the discussion to talk about the discovered key values. After meaning making: what do we mean by The staff will choose 4-6 key values. Then again the staff will talk about what do we mean by this value.

The 4-6 values are noted at the flipover.



Session 3 Co creating the Core qualities (30 minutes)

After break we started the 3. Session in which we focus on important core qualities.

Core qualities: where do we excel?

- Identify what an organization is extremely good at, where it excels.
- Core qualities are deeper qualities, gifts or strengths that characterize an organization and that lead to superior performance.
- When people are valued for what they are good at and encouraged to continuously improve their qualities, they (and therefore the entire organization) will be motivated and have the energy to perform better.

Starting point (10 minutes)

The core values were all printed single, and put around the floor. Participants were given 10 minutes in silence to walk and shop around and to find 4-6 core qualities.

Acceptance	Fulfillment	Playfulness
Achievement	Fun	Popularity
Adventure	Generosity	Power
Athleticism	Gratitude	Religion
Authenticity	Grit	Resilience
Beauty	Growth	Respect
Balance	Health	Romance
Bravery	Humor	Safety
Challenge	Independence	Security
Clarity	Integrity	Self-Expression
Community	Intelligence	Sensuality/Sexuality
Creativity	Intimacy	Service
Curiosity	Kindness	Simplicity
Discovery	Joy	Solitude
Diversity	Leadership	Spirituality
Empathy	Learning	Teamwork
Enthusiasm	Loyalty	Trustworthiness/Truth
Ethics	Mindfulness	Usefulness
Expertise	Nature	Warmth
Family	Openness/Open-Mindedness	Wisdom
Fitness	Passion	Vitality
Freedom	Personal Growth	
Friendliness/Friendships	Partnership	

What are we good at as a team?

What do others think of us?

What do others say about us?

What makes us stand out as a school, as a team?

What is our strength?

They write their qualities down and bring them to the staff discussion

Staff discussion (30 minutes)

Again the school leader will discuss the collection of core values and from this choose 4-6 qualities of which the team collectively agrees on. These selected core qualities are put at the flipover.

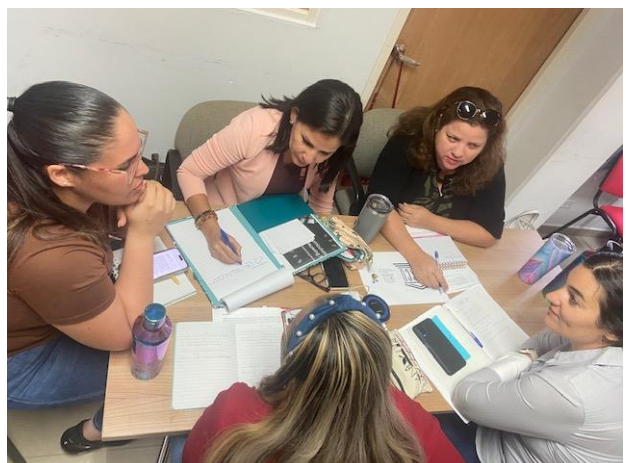
Session 4 Co creating the Bold Purpose

Press conference - The news in 2030 - 30 minutes

The last excersize concerns the formulation of the Bold goal. Bold goal: where do we go from here?

- It is a challenging vision of the future that can only be achieved through extreme effort, but is basically within reach.
- It refers to the dream or dreams an organization wishes to realize.
- For a bold goal to have the right effect, one must describe the end result as concretely possible, and one must set a deadline by which the goal will be achieved.
 - The challenge is to find a mutual answer
 - Challenging picture of the future
 - Within reach, but.... It takes considerable teamwork and effort
 - It is our dream that we feel like achieving together
 - It must also be concrete, to achieve it

The groups were made of 6 participants. They started to discuss and talk about all the finings so far (key Values, Core qualities and Higher Purpose) and then make an image as it was already 2030 and many goals were achieved. Together they prepared the press session, and 2 of each group took their task to present the final Bold Goal.You are proud! Enthusiastic about the results, the limits are in the skye. The presentation will take 5 minutes..



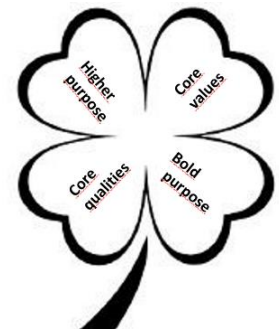
Press conference (30 minutes)



The room is set up as if it is a press conference: a desk for the presentors a back ground ppt slide, and the audience sitting in theater style, some micro phones for the press. Some people are appointed to record the press conference on their mobile phone, so that it can be used to describe the key elements of the Bold goals.

Further actions

At the end of two days each staff collected concept material to write their renewed School vision. In the following meeting at their school they will further refine their Vision, improve where necessary and form this they can use the vision as a compass for their future decisions and activities.



Results



At the end of the training days teachers felt more connected. Their positivism about the renewed vision filled the room. Especially the last press conference session opened up a visibly motivation and above all the enormous potential of these teachers to make better education for all children in their schools. The biggest challenge from now is to refine this vision and to keep it alive by constant dialoging and collaboration the coming years. They are all responsible to lereve the Vision out of the cabinet, unlock it and bring it to live in their daily actions.

Selected resources

For the resources about social construction we refer tot he first article out of three.

Van der Loo, H. en Geelhoed, J. (2015). *Kus de Visie Wakker!* Academic Services

Liberating structures <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/>